DOCUMENT RESUME

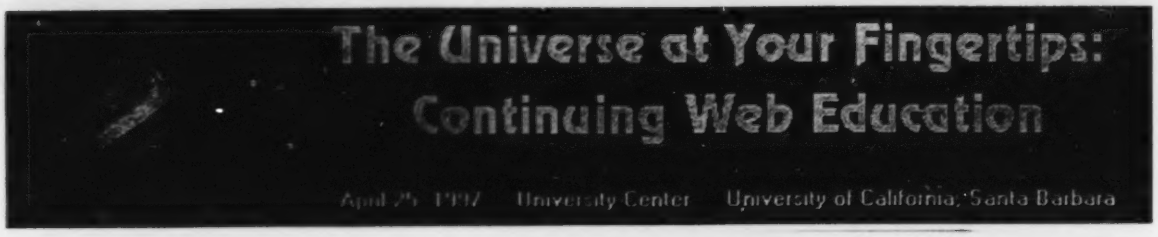
ED 412 909 IR 018 558

AUTHOR Cruse, Patricia; DeDecker, Sherry
TITLE How To Effectively Locate Federal Government Information on the Web.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at "The Universe at Your Fingertips: Continuing Web Education." Conference Sponsored by the Librarians Association of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Friends of the UCSB Library, and the Black Gold Cooperative Library System Reference Committee (Santa Barbara, CA, April 25, 1997). For papers from the proceedings of this conference, downloaded and printed out from the UCSB Web site, see IR 018 545-561.
AVAILABLE FROM Electronic version: http://www.library.ucsb.edu/universe/dedecker.html
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Computer Networks; Databases; Demography; *Federal Government; *Government (Administrative Body); *Government Publications; Governmental Structure; Internet; Legislation; *Online Searching; Online Systems; *Search Strategies; Statistical Data; User Needs (Information); *World Wide Web

ABSTRACT

Information from the U.S. Government is appearing with increasing frequency on the Internet. In many cases, the Internet is the only place to locate important government information. Virtually all agencies maintain their own web pages, which include linked statistical data, news releases, and other full-text publications. In the future, more data will be in online format rather than standard print sources, and searching the Web will become the primary means of locating government data. This paper shows how to maximize retrieval of federal government information on the Web. It first describes and illustrates the organizational structure of the Federal Government, knowledge of which is one of the keys to finding federal information on the Web. The paper then addresses: using search engines and subject indexes to locate federal information; tips on how to locate government agencies on the Web; search strategies to locate government regulations and legislation; and how to find statistics, demographics, and other useful data. Some of the major issues associated with government information in an electronic environment are explored. Includes 27 search questions and answers for practice in searching for government information. (Author/SWC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****


The Universe at Your Fingertips:
Continuing Web Education
April 25 1997 University Center University of California, Santa Barbara

ED 412 909

How to Effectively Locate Federal Government Information on the Web

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Patricia Cruse
Government Information Librarian
University of California, San Diego

Sherry DeDecker
U.S. Documents Librarian
University of California, Santa Barbara

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patricia Cruse
Sherry DeDecker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Copyright 1997, Patricia Cruse and Sherry DeDecker. Used with permission.

Abstract

Information from the U. S. Government is appearing with increasing frequency on the Internet. In many cases the Internet is the only place to locate important government information. Virtually all agencies now maintain their own web pages, on which are linked statistical data, news releases and other full-text publications. As time passes, more data will be in online format rather than standard print sources. In the future, searching the Web will become the primary means of locating government data.

This "hands-on" workshop is designed to demonstrate how to maximize retrieval of federal government information on the Web. Instruction on the best strategies for searching the major online sources will include:

- Using search engines and other resources to find government information.
- Tips on how to locate government agencies on the WWW.
- Search strategies to locate government regulations and legislation.
- How to find demographics and other useful data.

In addition, analysis and discussion of some of the major issues associated with government information in an electronic environment will be explored.

An annotated bibliography of sources will be provided.

Table of Contents

IR018558

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Know the Structure to Find the Information
- Using Search Engines and Subject Indexes to Locate Federal Information
- Laws of the Land
- Statistics, demographics and other useful data
- Major Issues to Consider

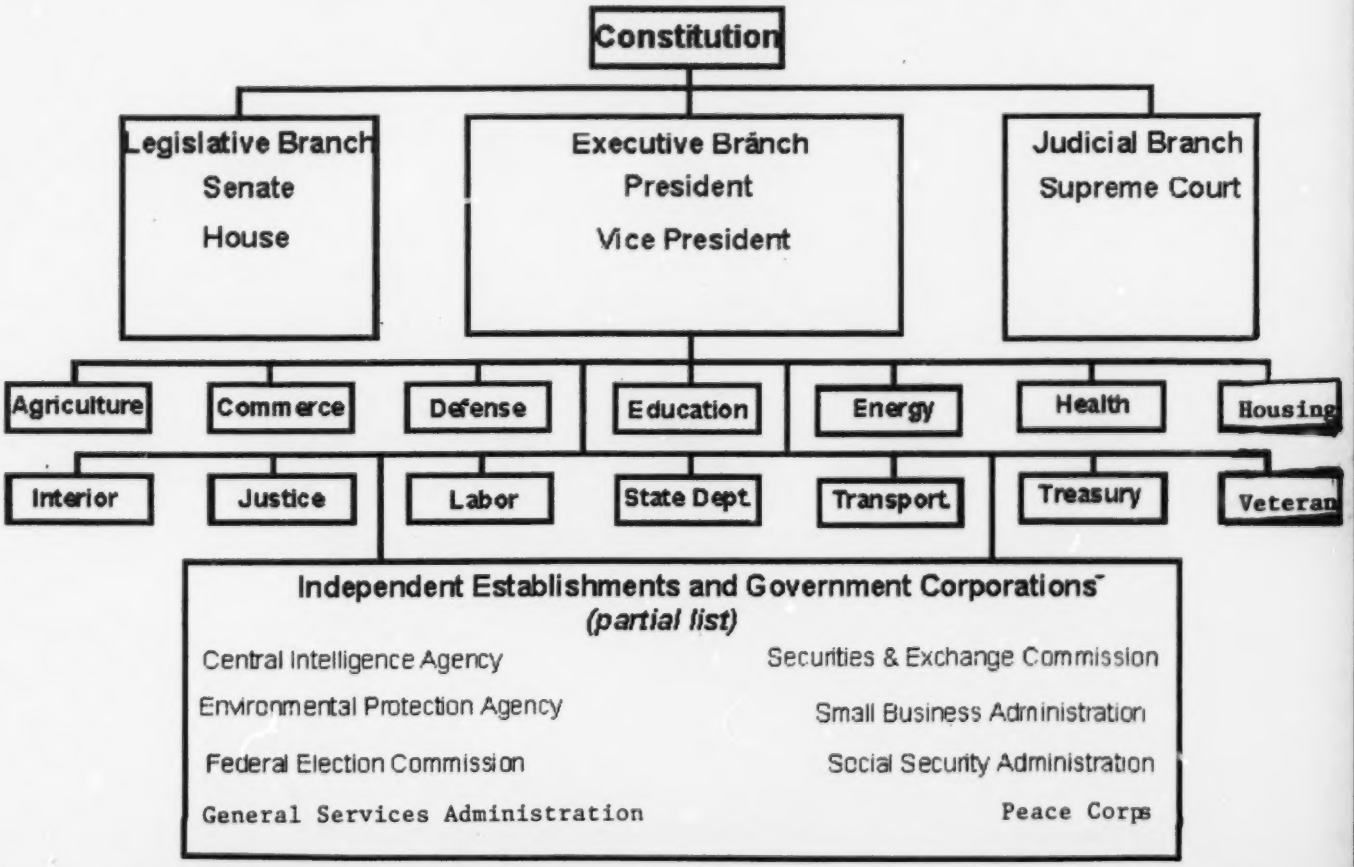
Know the Structure to Find the Information

One of the keys to finding federal government information on the WWW is understanding the organizational structure of the government. The *Constitution of the United States* establishes three separate branches of government: Legislative, Judicial, and Executive. In addition to these three branches, there is a fourth category: Independent Establishments and Government Corporations. All of these bodies of government maintain a presence on the WWW.

URLs or WWW addresses of federal agencies are usually based on the name of the particular agency. For example, the address of the Small Business Administration is **www.sba.gov**. This makes it easy to surmise the www address of federal agencies.

The graphic below represents the organizational structure of the Federal Government. The various bodies are *hot linked* to their WWW pages. All of the Executive Branch agencies provide links to various bureaus and subagencies. For example, the Department of Commerce WWW page will link to the U.S. Census Bureau's web page. Explore and see if you can find answers to the questions at the bottom of the page.

The Government of the United States



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

If you can't find an agency that you are looking for there are many WWW pages that provide access by agency to the many federal government WWW sites. All are arranged following the basic organizational structure of the federal government. Below are a few for you to browse.

Federal Agency Web Sites (LSU)

- Cleancut alphabetical listing of federal agency web sites. Note: Unable to connect 9/2/97.

Federal Web Locator (Villanova)

- Most comprehensive listing of hundreds of Executive, Legislative, Judicial, and Independent Agency web sites
- Arranged by agency but searchable by keyword

Questions:

1. What section of the Constitution of the United States establishes the power of the Legislative Branch?
2. What is the WWW address of the United States Patent and Trademark Office?
3. In which branch/department is the General Services Administration?
4. In which branch/department is the Government Printing Office?
5. How can you obtain a current information on applying for a National Science Foundation Grant?
6. Bonus Question: What is the current population of the United States?

Answers

Using Search Engines and Subject Indexes to Locate Federal Information

With the amount of government information appearing on the WWW growing at a phenomenal rate it can be very difficult to find what you are looking for -- even if you know which agency produces the information. Fortunately, there are many powerful search engines, subject indexes, and WWW pages designed to assist you in finding a particular government information resource. These resources vary significantly in their coverage. The following tutorial is designed to assist you in effectively using these resources to find what you are looking for and will help you answer the questions below.

Search Engines:

Search engines allow the user to enter keywords or phrases that are run against a database created automatically by spiders and robots. The search engine retrieves information based on two things: your query and how the search engine gathers the information. Since all the top Internet search services operate differently you must use several search engines to do a comprehensive search.

GovBot

The GovBot database has gathered 307,826 web pages from U.S. Government and Military sites around the country. Contains easy to use boolean search forms. One of the advantages of using GovBot is that it knocks out many irrelevant WWW sites since it only searches WWW sites that have a .gov or .mil domain name.

Alta Vista

Very fast and easy to use. Often at the top of "favorite search engine" lists. Help files provide assistance in formulating advanced queries.

Excite

Easy to use search interface. Excellent online help. Also provides a subject index approach to information.

Subject Indexes:

Subject indexes are hierarchically organized indexes that allow you to browse through lists of WWW sites by topic. They are selective lists of WWW sites that require some degree of human oversight whereas search engines automatically gather information. Generally, subject indexes are smaller than search engines. Because there is human oversight subject guides can save the user time by reducing the amount of irrelevant information.

Infomine

INFOMINE is a database developed by the librarians at the University of California, Riverside. It is easy to use and currently contains over 9,500 records covering most academic disciplines with a large section devoted to government information. It is known globally for its high quality scholarly and educational collection. Allows searching and browsing by subject, keyword, or title.

Yahoo

Yahoo is probably the most popular subject index on the WWW and often the best place to start when looking for information. The section on government information covers federal, states, local, and international government sites. Yahoo also has a search feature that is searches only Yahoo entries.

Pathway Services

A service provided by the Government Printing Office that brings together information from federal agencies under broad topical entries.

WWW Sites -- other great starting points:

University of Michigan Documents Center

This is simply one of the best sites for locating government information. The information is current, well organized, and easy to retrieve. A great starting place for beginners and experienced users alike.

US Government and Politics

A down home WWW homepage to government information. Links to help guides, catalogs, and other great sites.

Argus Clearinghouse

The Argus Clearinghouse provides a central access point for value-added topical guides which identify, describe, and evaluate Internet-based information resources. The Government & Law category includes guides on topics pertaining to the ruling of nations, states, and provinces, municipalities and other political regions.

Search Tips

Regardless whether you are using a search engine or a subject index the following tips will help you to better navigate the resources:

- Identify key search terms to describe what you are looking for.
- Consider synonyms, related words, foreign spelling, and plurals.
- Read the instructions or help files provided by the search engine or subject index.
- Modify your search (broaden or narrow) if you don't find what your looking for.
- Try other search engines or subject indexes if you are unsuccessful.

Questions:

1. Using GovBot, Altavista, and Excite can you find the text of President Clinton's most recent Inaugural Address? Is there an easier or more exact way to retrieve it?
2. Using Infomine, Yahoo, and Pathways search for the subject human rights. What is the difference in coverage of each of the subject indexes?
3. Can you find the current Consumer Price Index for San Diego using Altavista and Infomine? (Hint: remember to use variant terms, abbreviations, etc. when searching.)

Answers

Laws of the Land

Statutory Law

Statutory law can be defined as the original laws enacted by a body legally authorized to pass laws, such as Congress. When signed by the President, they become law, and can be accessed online through the Public Laws. These laws then become part of the U. S. Code.

Here are some sources to help both in understanding the process and locating legislation leading up to and including the incorporation of the final laws into the U. S. Code. The questions can test your knowledge.

How Our Laws are Made
The Legislative Process (Senate)
The Legislative Process - Tying it all Together (House of Representatives)

- Help guides to understanding the procedure involved in bills making their way from introduction through committees to the floor of both Houses

GPO Access (via Univ. of California)

- Congressional bills, reports and documents; Congressional Record
- U.S. Code/Public Laws

Thomas (Library of Congress)

- Access by subject or popular name to bills in the 103rd to 105th Congresses

Congressional Hearings on the Web (Univ. of Michigan)

- Links to hearings made accessible by House and Senate committees

Questions:

1. Were there any bills introduced in the current U. S. Congress that dealt with assisted suicide?
2. On Thomas, bills by topic (104th Congress), how many bills are listed under "humanities"? Who sponsored the Senate version? Were there any co-sponsors? What is the bill number? What is the status?
3. Was Santa Barbara mentioned in the 1997 Congressional Record?
4. Where can you find reference to the section of the Statutes at Large?

Answers

Administrative Law

Administrative law, also referred to as quasi-statutory law, refers to the rules and regulations which are written by agencies. These agencies are given authority by Congress to write and enforce these rules. The Federal Register is the medium for notifying the public of rules and proposed rules for all Federal agencies and departments. After publication in the Register as a final rule, the regulations are incorporated into the Code of Federal Regulations. The following links will take you to regulations; questions to try will follow.

Federal Regulations (Cornell)

- Good explanation of system and how to use the Federal Register and Code of Federal Regulations; includes a tutorial

Guide to Federal Regulations (Mansfield University)

- In addition to links to regulations, explains regulation process, including history

GPO Access (Univ. of California)

- Code of Federal Regulations/Federal Register

Questions:

1. Are there any pending regulations on ferrets? Any other entries in the Federal Register about them?
2. How can you limit your search in the Federal Register to just regulations?
3. How do you cite from the Code of Federal Regulations?

Answers

Case Law

Case Law refers to cases that give an interpretation of statutory laws. These laws can be in the appellate courts on the federal or state level, or, at the highest level, at the U. S. Supreme Court. The best sites we've found are listed here, followed by some sample questions.

Villanova Center for Information Law and Policy

- Comprehensive site for locating Federal or State court information

Supreme Court decisions (Cornell University)

- Supreme Court decisions from 1990; links to sites with older decisions (Villanova is one of them); also contains a section on Information about the Court

Flite database (Villanova)

- Archive of Supreme Court cases from 1937 - 1975

Questions:

1. In which court did the landmark case Brown vs. Board of Education begin?
2. How many cases on capital punishment have made it to the Supreme Court since 1990?
3. How many days in April 1997 did the Supreme Court hear arguments?

Answers

Statistics, Demographics and other Useful Data

Agencies of the Federal government provide some of the best sources for finding statistics. Many agencies have collected data on topics relevant to their missions for years. It has always been a challenge to find statistical data in print publications, as the titles are not always descriptive of the contents. With the advent of web publishing, it is now easier than ever to locate current statistics in many areas.

The below list is a sample of sites we refer to for finding data. After reviewing this list, try the questions at the end.

Comprehensive

Statistical Resources on the Web (Univ. of Michigan)

Government Information Sharing Project (Oregon State University)

- U.S. demographic, economic and education statistics

Statistical Abstract of the United States 1996

- Frequently requested tables of national and state data; the entire publication is viewable with PDF software.

Social Sciences Data Center (Univ. of California, San Diego)

- Links to many statistical sources

Demographic

Bureau of the Census Home Page

- The most comprehensive site for U. S. demographic data

U. S. Census Bureau Electronic Subscription Service

- The full-text reports on this system are accessible by subscription, and viewable with PDF software. One free subscription is available for each depository library.

Bureau of the Census

- Census summary tape files; 100% and sample population and housing data

Census and Demographic Data (Mansfield University)

- an annotated list of sources

Economic

STAT-USA (Department of Commerce)

- Trade statistics, market research reports for countries, daily economic releases. Access by subscription; one free subscription to each depository library Some of the information in this database is accessible free through issuing agency.

1997 Budget of the United States government

- The budget is also available on GPO Access: http://www.gpo.ucop.edu/

Regional Economic Information System (Univ. of Virginia)

- Local area economic data for states, counties and metropolitan areas

Economic Indicators (GPO Access)

- Monthly statistics prepared for Congress by the Council of Economic Advisors

U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Employment and labor statistics; includes Producer, Consumer and International Price Indexes data

County and City Data Book (Univ. of Virginia)

- County, city, state economic data

Education

National Center for Education Statistics

- Comprehensive site from U. S. Department of Education; includes contents of Digest of Education Statistics, Condition of Education, Projections of Education Statistics to 2006, and many other reports

ASKEric: U. S. Department of Education

- Educational Resources Information Center: A question-and-answer service and virtual library

Health

Guide to Locating Health Statistics (Univ. of Pittsburgh) [Note: Unable to connect 9/2/97]
Sites with Health Services Research and Public Health Information (Univ. of Washington)

- Subject access to U. S., foreign and international health information and statistics from governmental and non-governmental sites

National Center for Health Statistics

- Access to full text of many publications; may require PDF software

Centers for Disease Control

- HIV/AIDS Surveillance and Sexually Transmitted Diseases reports; may require PDF software

CDC Wonder

- Query system for CDC health statistics

Crime

Bureau of Justice Statistics

- Full text of many Department of Justice publications

1995 Crime in the United States (FBI)

- Requires PDF software. Highlights available at http://www.fbi.gov/publish.htm

Uniform Crime Reports, 1990 - 1993

- Univ. of Virginia interactive system for retrieving county level crimes and arrest data

Questions

1. How much did your congressman receive in PAC contributions from the 1994 campaign?
2. What is the current population of the U. S.?
3. What was the population in 1990 for Santa Barbara County?

4. What is the latest level of the Consumer Price Index?
5. What resources are listed under "Business and Industry" at the University of Michigan? Under "Demographics"?
6. How many men and women 35 and over were enrolled in colleges in 1970? In 1990? Projected for 2006?
7. How many cases of sexually transmitted diseases were reported by state health departments in 1941? In 1995?
8. What percent of murder victims were males?

Answers

Major Issues to Consider

Searching the web for federal government information is exciting and easy. However, there are some major unresolved issues to keep in mind as agencies switch many of their traditional print publications to an electronic format. Some issues to consider are:

1. Agencies are beginning to migrate some publications out of the Depository Library Program to the private sector. For example, publication of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute has been given over to Oxford University Press, although federal government employees work on this publication. What will be the impact if this trend continues?

2. Many agencies (Commerce in particular) are operating on a cost recovery basis. Depository libraries are being provided with limited access to core government information. For example, Depository libraries are being provided with a single password to access Census Bureau publications - this is a significant change.

3. There is a major archival question now that publications are no longer being published in print, but are available only electronically. Who will archive electronic materials? If an agency issues a policy statement on its web page today, and changes policy and rewrites the statement tomorrow, where is the first statement?

4. Viewing documents on the Web often requires downloading specialized software, such as PDF (portable document format) or TIFF files. Who will be available to help the user understand what these terms mean and what is required?

5. Much information found on the Web is inaccurate or undocumented. How will the searcher be able to distinguish the difference in information coming from an original source, such as a federal agency, with information put up by anyone with a little html knowledge?

6. The shift of government information from a paper to a more electronic environment impacts virtually every aspect of a Federal Depository Library including:

    - public service - how do you provide public service in an electronic environment?
    - collection development - how do you keep track of publications coming from agencies solely in electronic format?
    - space planning - how are the current physical spaces that are used for documents going to be used in the future if everything is electronic? What will a reference collection look like if everything is electronic?
    - bibliographic access - how are libraries going to provide access to electronic information? Are

libraries going to create records for their OPACs? If so, what standards are going to be used? Are libraries going to create WWW pages instead for access?

Answers*

*Many thanks to our colleagues at Arizona State University for providing us with the idea and many of these questions.

Know the Structure to Find the Information

1. **What section of the Constitution of the United States establishes the power of the Legislative Branch?**

   Click on the link to the Constitution in the chart for the Government of the United States. This will lead you to the Library of Congress' searchable electronic version of the Constitution. Do a search using the term legislative branch. The answer is: Article I.

2. **What is the WWW address of the United States Patent and Trademark Office?**

   The WWW address is www.uspto.gov.

3. **In which branch/department is the General Services Administration?**

   Use either the Federal Web Locator or Federal Agency Web Sites (LSU) to determine that the General Service Administration is an Independent Agency

4. **In which branch/department is the Government Printing Office?**

   Use either the Federal Web Locator or Federal Agency Web Sites (LSU) to determine that the Government Printing Office is part of the Legislative Branch.

5. **How can you obtain a current information on applying for National Science Foundation Grant?**

   Use either the Federal Web Locator or Federal Agency Web Sites (LSU) to locate the National Science Foundation's Web site and go to the section on grants.

6. **Bonus Question: What is the current population of the United States?**

   First you need to determine what federal agency might generate this information -- the answer is the Census Bureau. Then go the Census Bureau's Homepage: www.census.gov. The Census Bureau maintains a "clock" of the current population on their page.

Using Search Engines and Subject Indexes to Locate Federal Information

1. **Using GovBot, Altavista, and Excite can you find the text of President Clinton's most recent Inaugural Address? Is there an easier or more exact way to retrieve it?**

   Altavista is the easiest to find this information. Simply enter the keywords clinton inaugural address

and the site containing the information will be returned. Excite also is quick and easy -- the same search will lead you to many sites including "A Chronology of US Historical Documents" which contains the text. GovBot is a bit more problematic -- after many searches I still was unable to find the information. A better way to find President Clinton's most recent Inaugural Address would be to go directly to the White House. This would also guarantee an official version of the speech -- without mistakes -- and would knock out spoofs or parodies.

2. **Using Infomine, Yahoo, and Pathways search for the subject human rights. What is the difference in coverage of each of the subject indexes?**

   There is no right or wrong answer to this question. All of the indexes have human rights coverage -- Infomine includes CD-ROM titles and other "official" government sites. Yahoo is broader and pulls in non-government sources. Pathways provides a nice coverage from various government agencies.

3. **Can you find the current Consumer Price Index for San Diego using Altavista and Infomine? (Hint: remember to use variant terms, abbreviations, etc. when searching.)**

   Search Altavista using the terms CPI San Diego. This will direct you to a Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) News Brief that contains the information. Search Infomine using the term Consumer Price Index. This will lead you to the BLS Homepage where you have to search further for the information.

Laws of the Land

Statutory Law

1. **Were there any bills introduced in the current U. S. Congress that dealt with assisted suicide?**

   Search the text of bills through:
   Thomas
   GPO Access (via University of California)

2. **On Thomas, Hot Bills, how many bills are listed under "humanities"? Who sponsored the Senate version? Were there any co-sponsors? What is the bill number? What is the status?**

   Thomas

3. **Was Santa Barbara mentioned in the 1997 Congressional Record?**

   Congressional Record (Thomas)
   GPO Access via University of California)

4. **Where can you find reference from a particular bill to the corresponding section of the Statutes at Large?**

   GPO Access. Bring up the text of a bill to see the cross reference at the top.

Administrative Law

1. **Are there any pending regulations on ferrets? Any other entries in the Federal Register about them?**

Federal Regulations are available from the Code of Federal Regulations via GPO Access (University of California gateway). Alternate connection to the GPO Access databases is through the GPO site.

2. **How can you limit your search in the Federal Register to just regulations?**

   Select the Federal Register from GPO Gate; see the sections on the bottom of the search page.

3. **How do you cite from the Code of Federal Regulations?**

   See Citing Regulations on Larry Schankman's Mansfield University Federal Regulations page.

Case Law

1. **In which court did the landmark case Brown vs. Board of Education begin?**

   Cornell has an archive of the 300 most important Supreme Court cases:
   http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/

2. **How many cases on capital punishment have made it to the Supreme Court since 1990?**

   Check Cornell's list of current decisions; there is topical access to this database.

3. **How many days in April 1997 did the Supreme Court hear arguments?**

   Cornell has a court calendar on this home page.

Statistics, Demographics and other useful data

1. **How much did your Congressman receive in PAC contributions from the 1994 campaign?**

   The Federal Election Commission home page is http://www.fec.gov/index.html.

2. **What is the current population of the U. S.?**

   Check the Bureau of the Census page at http://www.census.gov/

3. **What was the population in 1990 for Santa Barbara County?**

   Information from the 1990 Census is available at http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup. You might also refer to the County and City Data Book: http://www.lib.virginia.edu/socsci/ccdb.

4. **What is the latest level of the Consumer Price Index?**

   The Consumer Price Index is available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics: http://stats.bls.gov.

5. **What resources are listed under "Business and Industry" at the University of Michigan? Under "Demographics"?**

   University of Michigan statistics page:

http://www.lib.umich.edu/libhome/Documents.center/stats.html.

6. **How many men and women 35 and over were enrolled in colleges in 1970? In 1990? Projected for 2006?**

   The National Center for Education Statistics has a subject index: http://www.ed.gov/NCES/pubs/d96/subindx.htm. Use the root of that address: http://www.ed.gov/NCES/ for a list of publications and statistical data.

7. **How many cases of sexually transmitted diseases were reported by state health departments in 1941? In 1995?**

   Check the Centers for Disease Control site at: http://www.cdc.gov/scientific.htm. .

8. **What percent of murder victims in 1995 were males?** Refer to the 1995 crime statistics at http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr95prs.htm.

Search "Universe" Papers "Universe" Home Page InfoSurf Home Page

Direct questions or comments about this page to webmaster@library.ucsb.edu.

This is an official University of California, Santa Barbara Library web page. Please read the Mission Statement and Policies and Procedures regarding this server. You may also view statistics for this server.

HTML 3.2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE